

Kids come first at Goodyear taekwondo studio

By Christina Fuoco-Karasinski

Haydar and Cassandra Baqir view taekwondo as a necessity.

Raised in Iraq, Haydar used the sport to survive. For his wife, taekwondo gave her the confidence she needed to combat the bullying she faced as a child in the West Valley.

In 2012, the Goodyear couple founded Master Haydar's Black Belt Academy to share their passion for taekwondo. Their hometown studio opened nearly two years ago to primarily teach Olympic-style taekwondo. Brazilian jiu-jitsu is covered in advanced and adult classes.

"We both come from very different places," Cassandra said. "For me, I grew up doing taekwondo from age 8 until I was 15 or 16 years old. It was a big confidence booster and allowed me to be more independent.

"As a female and the only child when I was growing up, let's just say I was bullied. It gave me the confidence for my entire life."

Her husband was raised in Iraq, a victim of bullying and violence.

"For him, it allowed him to protect himself," she said.

After finishing school in his late teens, he was on his own, and struggling to find a job. He became so talented in taekwondo, however, that he received a scholarship to train with the masters in South Korea. He left his birth country

behind.

As Haydar studied in South Korea, Cassandra taught English there after a stint in the Peace Corps. The two met, fell in love and moved to the United States in 2009 with their two cats.

Haydar brought his talents to the West Valley. He has more than 20 years' experience in World Taekwondo Federation taekwondo, kickboxing, Muy Thai and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. He is a Kukkiwon-certified sixth degree black belt. She said her husband "expects a lot from his students" at Master Haydar's, which focuses on sparring and competing. He pushes them "pretty hard to do the best they can."

The Baqirs are so passionate about the sport that they don't require students sign contracts. They have waived fees for those who are struggling financially.

"We try to make sure it stays affordable for as many people as possible," Cassandra said. "If we won the lottery, we would do it so people could have a life-changing experience like us."

Haydar puts it simply. "We want money, too," he said with a laugh. "It's not our focus though. Our focus is on kids, first."

That is important to him, especially after growing up in a country that he said doesn't support children. Haydar added he's paving the way for kids to have a better future.



Haydar Baqir of Master Haydar's Black Belt Academy in Goodyear teaches discipline, control, respect and self-defense. (West Valley View photos by Ray Thomas)

Throughout his journey, though, there have been two takeaways.

"I had an opportunity to get out of my country and meet my wife," he said.

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Haydar Baqir trains John Robinson, 7, of Goodyear and other students in his studio.

Author captures high school sports history

By Israel Gonzalez

When Scott Hanson was umpiring a Paradise Valley High School baseball game with his friend, Stan Hoover, he didn't expect to find his next story idea just hanging on a wall.

"I was umpiring a game and my umpire partner came to me about the third inning and pointed to the right field fence," Hanson said. "There were about eight or nine retired numbers out there and he said, 'Hey, I have your next book. Who are those numbers and who do they belong to and why did they retire them?'"

Before the game finished, Hanson asked the coach about the retired jersey numbers and started to work on his new project. The book *What's Your Number?* contains stories and

high school photos behind the retired numbers in Arizona high schools across the state.

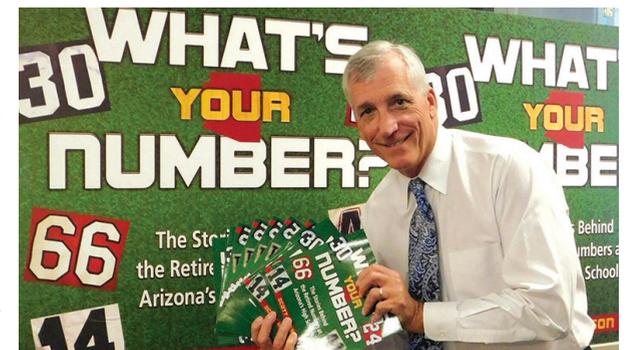
Hanson, a 30-year high school football and baseball official, spent a year talking to athletic directors, families of athletes, historians and just about anybody who can help solve the mystery behind all the retired numbers. Hanson's goal was to preserve high school athletic history.

"I wanted to capture some of what's becoming lost Arizona history," Hanson said. "If you showed up out at Buckeye High School and you saw (Jerry) Bridgman's number hanging there, people aren't going to know who that is unless you grew up in '50s or '60s or went to high school with him or

whatever. And I think that's kind of a shame that we lose that from generation to generation."

Bridgman, a Buckeye High School football star, is just one of 186 high school athletes across the state who have had their number retired. Other West Valley athletes include right fielder for Los Angeles Angels Kole Calhoun from Buckeye High School, and Pro Football Hall of Famer Randall McDaniel from Agua Fria High School. With 186 athletes' stories in the book, not all were positive.

"What I did find also in doing the



Scott Hanson, a 30-year high school football and baseball official, spent a year researching the stories behind the retired numbers of Arizona high school athletes. (Photo courtesy Scott Hanson)

research is there a lot of tragedy, a lot of tragic stories," Hanson said. "There was a lot of kids who died suddenly in an accident or unexpectedly in their

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